

SEPTEMBER 30, 1982

The fall shipping is bound to be winding down in the Shortgrass Country. Last week, San Angelo had it's biggest run of sheep for the year. Cattle, also, have had big days. Trucks moving in from the west don't seem to be in such a hurry. So my guess is that the harvest is going to end earlier than usual.

Some of us with the driest country are having a hard time finding a stopping point. In July, plans were to winter all of our ewe lambs and most of the heifer calves. By the third week of August the heavy end of both species sounded right. Two weeks into September still with no rain, the replacements started sounding burdensome and quite a number of the good aged ewes and cows began to look old.

I don't think I told you, but I began to see a change in the herders at the last special calf sale. I don't mean that they were getting suddenly grey bearded. Nearly any rancher that went through the decade of the '70s has lost his childhood colors. What I noticed was how quiet everyone was in the stands at the ring and the amount of throat clearing that was going on during the sale.

Even the auctioneer was having a hard time keeping his stride. I walked down to the last rail at ringside. Looking back toward the top row, facing the crowd, I'd estimate that three fourths of the audience was staring at their boots or the stair steps leading to their seats.

A more careful study made me remember that the same guys were sitting in the same places at the last calf sale in August. I was so startled by the discovery that I went up and asked an old boy I'd known a long time whether he'd been home since I'd seen him there three or four weeks before.

He's a plenty deceptive sort of fellow. During every waking hour he keeps a big briar pipe fogging at about the rate that makes environmentalists shut down the smoke stacks at a factory. Like all pipe smokers, you can't tell whether he's ever going to make a move other than to refill and relight his pipe.

So when I did get an answer from him, I couldn't see his face close enough to tell if he was telling the truth. He claimed that he was going to the ranch every morning early. But from the looks of the burned matches and the ash dump under his feet, I suspect that the close of one of those August sales was so filled with disappointment that he was too paralyzed to leave his seat.

One thing that does come to mind should herders start holding sit-down strikes around auction rings is to remember the farmers' revolt back in the late '70s. The tractor jockeys did everything short of defacing the capitol dome to gain attention all one cold winter. More help was given the Eskimo tribes along the Bering Strait than those planters received.

All I want to know in case any of our crowd plans on striking is the time, so I can go into disguise. No more popular than we are, we need to be as inconspicuous as possible, especially with pre. dictions for a bad winter covering the daily news.

To be sort of honest, I don't think that pipe-smoking cowboy is locked to his auction seat. For one thing, the management couldn't allow that to get started or they'd end up with rows of hombres who didn't even have the money for a smoke. The way the cattle market has been acting the last few weeks, it's hard to drive home alone.

I'll watch that old boy at the next sale. He just may like the air circulation in that part of the auction barn.